Socialist Worker special

U.S.S.R.:

Great victory over coup

THE workers of the USSR have won a great victory in smashing the right wing coup. If the coup had been successful, a Chilean style regime would have been put in place.

Thousands of democrats and trade unionists would have been rounded up. The terror of the KGB would have been re-imposed. There would be no hope of independence for republics that wanted to leave the USSR.

The Western media pretend that the coup was defeated by one man—Borris Yeltsin. In fact, it was the actions of hundreds of thousands of workers that terrified the coup leaders.

The miners who had fought Gorbachev's price rises in April were to the fore in resisting the coup. They took strike action in Georgia, the Ukraine, Siberia and Byelorussia. There was a huge strike wave in Leningrad.

Alexander Kondrarshov, of the strike committee in the 40,000 strong Kirov plant explained what happened in his workplace: 'we told them (the bosses) that we would take over the management of the plant if they resisted the strike'

It was this militant mood which gave the confidence to the soldiers to resist their generals.

Hardly anyone fought the coup out of any love for Gorbachev. He appointed virtually all the coup leaders to high office. He gave them their taste for blood when he stood over the massacre of citizens in Georgia in 1989 and the murder of civilians in Lithuania in January 1991.

People fought back to defend democratic rights and to end the horrible regime of privilege enjoyed by the Communist party bureaucrats. We must now hope that they carry through on their victory.

Every factory manager, press editor, police chief and army officer who supported the coup should be driven out of office. The KGB should be broken up. The leaders of the coup must be brought to trial and made to pay fully for their crimes. The headquarters of the local Communist parties should be taken over by the workers. This is the only way to prevent the right wingers having another attempt at a coup.

Uproot

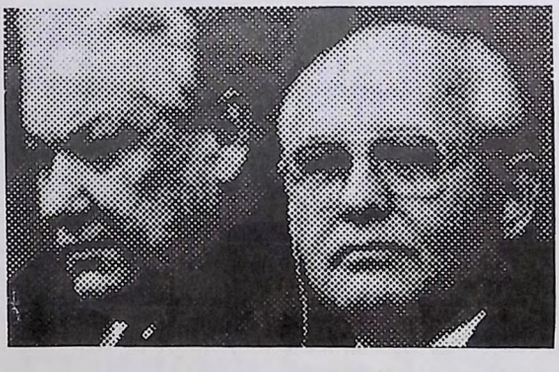
But the organisation that is needed to uproot the coup conspirators can also grow into activity to deal with the economic crisis in Russia.

Workers need to press for the dismantling of the huge military machine which sucks the best available resources out of Russian society.

They need to impose their control over the factories and the transport system to end the years of mismanagement under Gorbachev.

Gorbachev will try to change a around a few people at the top. But the working class who defeated the coup should brush these attempts aside.

But Yeltsin has no solutions



THE Western press have found a new hero: Borris Yeltsin. But Russian workers need to be on guard against his politics.

Yeltsin belongs to the liberal democrats in the USSR. He defends democratic rights but also argues that the market and private capitalism can solve the USSR's problems.

Unions

Yeltsin and the liberal democrats have had to turn to the workers movement to build a base. Yeltsin has gone out of his way to build links with the independent miners unions, for example.

But he seeks to use the workers movement as a battering ram to achieve his objectives. This has often brought him into sharp conflict with workers.

When the miners were on strike in April, Yeltsin came out against solidarity strikes in the Russian Federation.

He helped Gorbachev bring the miners strike to an end.

Afterwards he signed an anti-strike pact with Gorbachev which called for an end to 'intolerable attempts to gain political ends by incitement to disobedience or strikes'.

The victory over the right wing coup will lead eventually to a major clash between Yeltsin and the workers.

People now have tremendously high expectations. They want answers to the misery and poverty of the food queues. But Yeltsin's pro-market policies cannot deliver the goods.

The experience of Eastern Germany shows this. 30% of people are unemployed in East Germany. Food prices have gone through the roof.

Yeltsin and his advisors know that a sharp turn to the market can be carried though only by a strong semi-dictatorial regime. The Mayor of Moscow, Popov—a Yeltsin supporter—has argued openly that harsh authoritarian measures will be needed.

This is why Yeltsin will want to protect the officer core of the army and the KGB provided they are loyal to HIS parliament.

But in the struggle to come, thousands of workers have lost their fear of the KGB and the repressive forces. They have tasted their own power. And if they have the strength to defend democratic rights, they will also learn that they have the strength to improve their economic conditions.

In 1985, Gorbachev was a hero for hundreds of thousands of USSR workers. Today they will hold him in contempt. The illusions in Yeltsin will last only a fraction of that time.

What Gorbachev stands for

BY THE 1980s the Russian economy was in a mess. Complete state control of industry had been useful before and after WW2 when the world economy had retreated behind national boundaries. By the 1980s, there were major changes.

Billions of pounds could be transferred around the world in seconds as the world economy became more integrated. Multi-national production lines were set up. The most efficient industry was that geared for world markets.

The most far sighted Russian rulers saw the need for change if they were to survive. This was the basis for perestroika.

Gorbachev had never been known as a reformer. He was part of the bureaucracy. He was groomed to take over by Andropov, the head of the KGB.

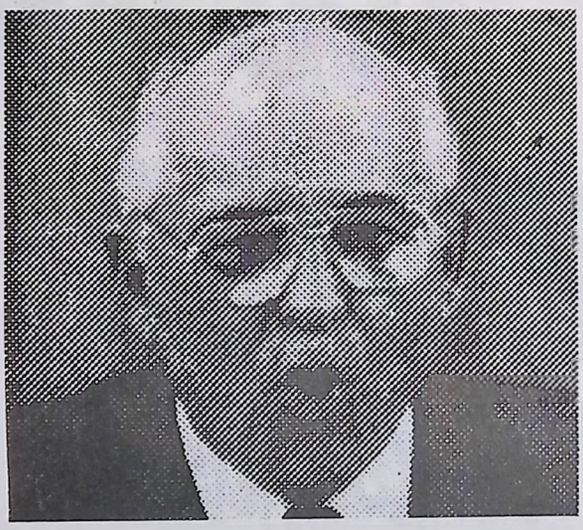
When he came to power, the restructuring of the economy came first and Glasnost second. Initially all went well. The West promised aid and many in Russia sided with him.

But very soon he met his major problem. The millions of party bureaucrats and managers opposed any moves to openess as it threatened their extremely privileged positions. Gorbachev was trying to reform the state when large sections of the state did not want to be reformed.

Two factions grew up in the bureaucracy. The conservatives and the 'radicals' who thought Gorbachev was going too slow. Increasingly Gorbachev became isolated. He had to balance between these two forces.

In March 1991 when 300,000 demonstrated for his resignation Gorbachev strengthened the KGB and purged the media playing one side off against the other in a bid to hold onto power.

The freedom under Gorbachev was just as delicate as his balancing act. He tried desperately to curtail the right to strike. He sent his troops into the oil rich Baku in February 1990 to butcher demonstrators.



51% of Russia's workforce are women. Gorbachev is intent on pushing them back into the home. As his book 'Perestroika' says 'we should make it possible to return to their purely womanly mission'.

Gorbachev's twists and turns can only be explained by the fact that his primary concern is to make Russia competitive on the world market. Ordinary people in the USSR hate him. As the dissident Andrei Sakharov told him in 1989, 'your personal popularity is zero'.

Blood and Coke don't mix

AFTER the Tienanmen Square massacre on June 1989, George Bush cried crocodile tears while he set about 'improving' US trade links with China. A deal was signed making China one of the 'most favoured nations' All condemnation of the massacre was dropped.

But lo and behold. Bush is now threatening China with sanctions. A belated conscience attack? Not likely.

It seems the Chinese government has erected 'unfair' trade barriers against US goods and that under Chinese law trademarks, patents and copyrights of Western companies can't be guaranteed.

This has upset multinationals like Coca Cola who find their profits hit.

Bush has stepped in to help his friends in big business. Its symbolic of how capitalism works that Coca-Cola's profits mean more than 2,000 slaughtered students.

Bush has nothing to offer Russian people fighting against Stalinism.

The years that led to the showdown

1995: Gorbachev comes to power promising freedom and a restructuring of the economy so it can compete with the West.
Summer 1989: Huge miners strikes demand pay rises and better conditions. Gorbachev backs down.
December 1989: Dissident Andrei Sakharov calls for a 2 hour general strike to end one party rule, calls it off and then calls it again. Despite his vacillation strikes occur. Demos broken up by riot police. Gorbachev threatens to resign as he is attacked by conservatives and radicals. Neither side is confident enough to see him go, so they back down.
February 1990: Fuel shortages. Food riots. National question erupts. Gorbachev sends troops to slaughter demonstrators in oil rich Baku. Troops intervene in Lithuania and Georgia. First independent trade union in the USSR (SOTSPROF) grows to 60,000 members from 6,000 nine months previously.
March 1990: Lithuania declares independence. Gorbachev increases military manoeuvers and orders KGB to keep border open. Defeat of Communist Party by democratic candidates in elections. Gorbachev accepts the idea of a multi-party system but simultaneously strengthens his powers. Ukranian miners strike.
June 1990: Yeltsin tells miners not to strike as it would cause 'conflagration'.
July 1990: Yeltsin eventually supports call for miners strike. Hundreds of thousands strike.
August 1990: Inflation at 80% per year. Gorbachev supports rapid 500 day plan to move to the market.
September 1990: Prime Minister Ryzhkov warns of 'danger of disintegration of USSR'. Gorbachev disowns plan for rabid move to the market which would mean unemployment, cuts and price rises. 100,000 demonstrate against Gorbachev.
March 1991: Calls for Ukranian independence. Yeltsin supports strikes calling for wage rises and Gorbachev's resignation. 800,000 demonstrate in Moscow. Gorbachev puts hard liners in charge of interior ministry, strengthens the KGB and purges the media in an attempt to remain in power. The Right Wing hint at the need for a 'Third Force'—a military coup.
August 1991: The failed coup launched by the hardliners.

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